

Council Corner



Pagoda Foundation

Recently, City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the Pagoda Foundation that will allow the Foundation to begin working to become self sustaining. While this iconic building will remain a City-owned property, the Foundation will assist with the management and care of the building. One of the Foundation's initiatives will be to coordinate a series of meetings to

begin preparing a strategic plan and to meet with the businesses and organizations that hold events on Mt. Penn to coordinate in a way that will make the events even more successful. While those of us who have lived in the area for years at times take Mt. Penn for granted, visitors to the area are blown away by the majesty of the mountain and its proximity to the downtown.



Reading Area Water Authority and The 2015 Budget

Council has come to an agreement with the Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA) on an amendment to the terms of the water lease. As you know the mayor and Council did not agree on how to approach this issue which resulted in the mayor walking away and removing the administration from the discussions about the water system. Council was aware of a projected 2015 budget deficit and Council did not want to be backed into a corner by the mayor during the 2015 budget process. Council began talks to settle the matter with RAWA. The water system is owned by the City and the system is leased to RAWA through a 50-year lease agreement initiated in 1994. The lease payment in the 1994 agreement was never reevaluated and never formally increased. A short term valuation of the system provided Council with a price range for a new lease payment and Council asked RAWA what payment it could make without increasing the water rates. RAWA said it could afford an \$8M annual payment.

The mayor has refused to sign the agreement approved by Council because he was not included in the talks with RAWA and the \$8M negotiated with RAWA will not close the entire projected budget gap. However, Council has repeatedly responded that the \$8M lease payment is a baseline figure and that if the mayor wishes to obtain a higher lease payment he can work with RAWA to obtain one. Council hopes the mayor will reconsider his opinion, sign the agreement and then work to

close the budget gap. As the City begins the 2015 budget process, Council is unsure how the administration will address the projected \$12M gap (using a \$4M lease payment, rather than the \$8M in the new agreement).

The Reading Eagle Editorial Board suggests that the City reduce spending rather than discuss new revenue avenues. We would be interested in learning exactly what spending reductions they are referring to. Over the past 18 years, the City's Public Works workforce has been reduced by over half, which makes it increasingly difficult for the City to manage and care for its properties, streets, etc. Under Act 47, the Police Department sustained a 40-man reduction. We are thankful that Chief Heim and the police staff had the wherewithal to identify a strategy to manage that reduction and still reduce crime.

PFM recently explained that 40% of the 2015 budget is dedicated to debt service (\$15M) and the MMO pension payment (\$15M). Adding in the budget amounts for Police and Fire and Rescue services leaves the City with approximately \$10M to cover all remaining public services.

PFM explained to Council that the big increase in the City's MMO pension payment was caused by State Act 44 which now requires municipalities to amortize the MMO payment. The Act 44 requirements increased the City's MMO payment from

\$8M to \$11M in 2013. The estimate for 2015 is \$14-15M.

PFM noted that while the number of City employees has decreased since 2010, the pension costs have doubled. They noted that the Police pension area has increased the most due to the retirement incentive which was eliminated in the last FOP contract. They stated that overall wages have fallen by 40% in the Police area, by 35% in the Fire area and by 14% in the Officers and Employees area.

City Council and PFM recognizes that Reading residents are feeling the pinch and that the City will need to do more creative things to cover the costs for the City's basic public services.

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Cotton St. Paving Project—A First Step To Neighborhood Renewal

The residents of Cotton Street have patiently waited for over five years for the repaving of this main thoroughfare through East Reading. After years of driving over metal plates and block long pot-holes, the end is in sight. Through combined funding from the City of Reading and UGI, the repaving project is slated to start at the end of July and should be completed by the end of August 2014. While this schedule is subject to change due to weather conditions or unexpected ground conditions, the residents of Cotton Street will be rewarded with a newly repaved street by September 2014.

I would like to thank all the Cotton Street neighbors for both their persistence and perseverance through the major infrastructure projects. From the repair and replacement of water mains to the enormous UGI gas meter replacement project, life has not been easy. We all know that our city is old and these projects are a part of ongoing maintenance. To update neighbors on the Cotton Street Repaving Project, I held a community meeting on July 15th at the City Reach Church at 1010 Cotton Street. This meeting provided an important opportunity for City officials to address the neighbors' concerns. The following are two links that provide you with detailed questions and answers on issues addressed:

Cotton Street Repaving Project Questions and Answers:

<http://www.readingpa.gov/content/cotton-street-paving-project-public-meeting-qa-follow>

Watch Community Meeting on YouTube

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_DIViWc7YA&feature=youtu.be

Besides the Cotton Street Repaving Project, neighbors requested information on many other issues including concerns about the UGI meter replacement project and issues regarding crime and community involvement. I believe the strongest neighborhoods are those with active citizen participation. Therefore the next step to the renewal of Cotton Street is to revive neighborhood meetings. Therefore in partnership with City Reach Church, I held the next Cotton Street meeting on Thursday August 21st at 7:00 pm.

We need your input:

Have any questions about city services you need answered?

Want to be a part of making a difference in your neighborhood?

Have any ideas for community projects?

And remember:

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has—Quote by Margaret Mead

Be part of that small group that makes a difference in your neighborhood.

Please e-mail your responses to mghinner@comcast.net

District 2 Trivia Questions



Answer all ten District Two Trivia Questions correctly and be entered into a drawing for tickets for two at a Reading Royals Game.

1. Name the actor and movie filmed in East Reading.

Answer: _____

2. What is the name of the sewer main that runs under Muhlberg Street?

Answer: _____

3. What were the years of operation of the original Pandora Amusement Park?

Answer: _____

4. What year did the City of Reading take possession of the Reading Pagoda?

Answer: _____

5. Who built the Bandshell in City Park?

Answer: _____

6. The fieldhouse at Pandora Park contains stones from what former city landmark?

Answer: _____

7. Where is the anchor from the Battleship Main?

Answer: _____

8. How many monuments are there in Veteran's Grove in City Park?

Answer: _____

9. Name the United States President statute on Perkiomen Ave. in City Park.

Answer: _____

10. What former Reading City Councilman owned a bar on Cotton Street?

Answer: _____

Good Luck!!!

Please e-mail your responses to mghinner@comcast.net



District 4—Stratton Marmarou

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Proposed Parking Plan for Albright Area

The Albright College area of District 4 has had an increase in the number of rental properties and an increase in the number of Albright students who attend college and reside off campus. In addition, Albright has recently changed their policies regarding students who own or use cars, which has pushed more cars off Albright owned lots into the residential neighborhoods.

A few blocks in this area that intersect directly with the campus have elected to use the City's Residential Parking Permit program and as far as I know this has served those blocks well. At a January College Heights Community Council (CHCC) meeting, Patrick Mulligan, Executive Director of the Parking Authority, heard from neighbors who have experienced new parking challenges. Mr. Mulligan said he would look into the matter and return with a proposal.



Patrick Mulligan

At the June CHCC meeting, Mr. Mulligan presented a proposal to begin a parking zone program. Under this program, cars that are registered with PennDOT at the address where the person resides can register their vehicles with the Parking Authority. Registration is free for up to two vehicles per address per year and \$25 per vehicle per year for additional vehicles. Using technology, Parking Authority Enforcement Officers would scan license plates in the parking zone neighborhoods and license plates that are not properly registered will be ticketed. This is not a "Pay to Park" program or a Residential Parking Permit program.

Mr. Mulligan suggested an area to start the parking zone program and he explained that creating parking zones or residential permit parking usually pushes those not registered out into adjoining blocks. He stated that people who register their vehicles can go onto the Parking Authority website to download visitor parking permits that can be printed at no charge when they have company or parties. He also stated that contractors who are doing work in the area will not be ticketed as long as the Enforcement Officer can identify that the vehicle belongs to a contractor or other type of service.



Many of those present at the June CHCC meeting favored the proposal but would like to study it further. A committee to look at the parking zone proposal, the recommended area and the regulations will begin meeting in July and a recommendation will be made to the CHCC membership around September.

If you live in a neighborhood outside the Albright area that has parking challenges, I encourage you to contact Mr. Mulligan at the Parking Authority and ask him to look at your neighborhood to propose a program that could assist.



Reading Parking Authority

Park Smart, Park Legal, Everyday

District 6—Jeffrey Waltman



Nothing changes...If nothing changes

In 1996, I was a member of the Reading volunteer “Financial Improvement Team” (FIT). Many of the problems then, are the same problems now. There has been a few different twists and a few changes along the way that got us through some difficult periods; but in the end, Reading was always facing the looming 5 year deficit projections.

So here we are on the brink of preparing the City of Reading 2015 budget and also mapping out the next few years in an amended Act 47 plan. Some things have changed, and some haven’t. First it’s important to point out that the taxes we pay are supposed to be an investment that improves the equity value of our homes, not an expense.

It is my goal in the coming months to push all members of City Council and the administration to build into our amended Act 47 plan, challenging, but critical steps to improve our long term capacity to turn this city around and to produce positive equity results for everyone’s annual investment in this city.

We have to address the issue of pensions. Currently you can retire from the Reading Police Department as early as the age of 37 and begin collecting your full allocation of your pension while you go on and begin a new career. Often officers move onto the County for employment where we as City taxpayers begin to pay for their second pension through our County taxes. It’s our problem to fix and not their fault. It’s important to state that.

Secondly, there are tens, if not hundreds of millions of dollars of “unearned income” are being poured into City residents from state and federal assistance and welfare programs. None of which do we receive any income taxes for, and in fact the City earned income taxpayers have to then leverage that shortfall with our high income taxes. So the rest of the state is left out of the equation. And in the end it ironically costs the state and federal government even more in downstream costs. It’s our problem to fix and not the poor’s fault. It’s important to state that.

Thirdly, we have to earn more than the 3 million dollars a year we currently collect from our sewer system that was cut back from \$6.7 million nearly 10 years ago. Those cuts have cost us nearly 30 million in revenue. It’s our problem to fix and quite frankly is our own fault.

There are other many many issues facing our City. None of which we’ll ever solve without going after some of these bigger and very costly problems first. Our amended Act 47 plan has to be thorough at all levels. I want your investment in the City to bring you a return. I want mine to do the same. Let’s solve problems, not create more by ignoring them any longer. They will not go away on their own.

*Should you find yourself in a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is likely to be more
be more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks. Warren Buffett*

By Chuck Liedike

Google search "'property tax reform' Pennsylvania", and see what comes up. One article I found addressed a proposal from May 1981. It's true! For decades, Pennsylvanians have been calling for real property tax reform! Promises were made with past bills, but results simply weren't delivered. This all changed recently with the introduction of Senate Bill 76.

Years ago, The Reading-Berks Association of REALTORS(r) met with Representative Sam Rohrer regarding his plan to eliminate property taxes. The plan itself didn't gain enough statewide support, but the issue remained a top priority for many Pennsylvanians. In 2012, Representative Jim Cox met with a few of us to discuss his newest plan: House Bill 1776. Unfortunately, the numbers did not add up in this bill. However, our input allowed the authors of the bill to make the correct alterations. After follow-up consultation, the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS(r) (PAR) voted to make Senate Bill 76 a Priority 1 issue. PAR conducted a study of the bill. We learned that the bill was solvent. This bill provided the necessary property tax reform that residents have been demanding.

In order to increase awareness and support, we determined that we needed to launch a full-scale grassroots campaign. This is where the Reading-Berks Association of REALTORS(r) came back into the picture. Our state association recognized the work we locally had done in pushing the property tax reform discussion forward. I was fortunate enough to be selected as the Campaign Manager for our grassroots initiative called Real Reform 76. Much of my responsibilities have included speaking around Pennsylvania at hundreds of Town Hall meetings, roundtables, civic groups, one-on-one

discussions, TV and radio, office meetings, and so much more. Although we knew much about the bill locally, there were areas of Pennsylvania that don't know much about this bill. These meetings gave us an opportunity to speak with residents, school board members, school district staff, local Chamber leaders, business leaders, state and local elected officials, REALTORS(r), home builders, apartment owners and other individuals. I have personally met with at least 8,000 people. It's been an experience to say the least. Most residents are fully in support of the bill. However, there have been very small handfuls who haven't taken time to truly understand the bill. These people spoke against the bill, only to later learn that their concerns were actually addressed in the bill.

As I travel the state, I've had meetings in the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as well as the following Counties: Adams, Allegheny, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Butler, Bradford, Cambria, Carbon, Centre, Chester, Crawford, Dauphin, Delaware, Erie, Fayette, Indiana, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Montgomery, Northampton, Schuylkill, Somerset, Sullivan, Westmoreland, Wyoming and York. Much of my focus has been made on Senate Finance Committee legislative districts, since Senate Bill 76 sits in that particular committee. In order to get this bill passed, we needed to gain their support. The newest member of the State Senate, Scott Wagner, won as a write-in candidate in York County. Senator Wagner spoke strongly in favor of real property tax reform. In early May, he signed on as a co-sponsor for this bill. However, there continues to be legislators opposed to this bill. They state that this isn't an issue in their area. Residents have told me otherwise. In order for this bill to pass, residents need to

continue contacting their member of the State Senate. They can do so via www.RealReform76.com.

The Real Reform 76 grassroots initiative has made significant progress statewide. In short, our presence is primarily seen online, in-person awareness, TV spots, radio spots and mail pieces. I've been involved in many campaigns over the past decade, but none have been as strategic as this campaign. REALTORS(r) are working hard to advance this bill. We can only do so much though. There are many groups fighting against the passage of this bill. Residents need to come together, and voice their support. To learn more about what you can do, feel free to reach out to me:

ChuckL@realestateinberks.com.

SENATE BILL 76

REAL PROPERTY TAX REFORM

RealReform76.com



Habitat for Humanity of Berks County is hoping to cause a commotion in the City of Reading - both with its current project as well as its long range plans as it works to impact families and neighborhoods and grow to meet the housing needs in Reading.

Habitat's current project, the 4th and Elm Cluster Build, showcases the organization's ongoing commitment to help revitalize Reading by not only providing homes for its partner families, but by renovating multiple adjacent homes simultaneously, with a focus on neighborhood development. This project is the first of what Habitat hopes will be many cluster builds in the city and is the prototype for how Habitat will meet the demands of numerous renovation project to help utilize the large inventory of vacant and blighted properties in the city limits. Work on this project started in May with Habitat's participation in National Women Build Week, during which 50 local women worked to begin the clean out of the homes, located at 300,302,304 and 306 N. Elm Street. Recent work at the project site included a Demolition Derby during the week of July 14, which engaged local contractors to provide volunteers to begin the pulling down the walls and ceilings in the four units.

"Our 4th & Elm Project is just the beginning of how Habitat for Humanity of Berks County will utilize its ability to stabilize neighborhoods by increasing home owners," said Tim Daley, Executive Director of Habitat's Berks County affiliate. "Habitat's impact on the housing stock of this community is enhanced as we placed responsible homeowners in our houses and allow them to make the

positive changes consistent with healthy communities. The blend of renovating blighted properties and placing responsible families in them is a stands as a cornerstone for a better future for the City of Reading."

Habitat is working on an aggressive, six year plan with the intention of completing an additional 30-35 home renovations by the end of 2020. Working in partnership with other local housing agencies, including Our City Reading, The Reading Redevelopment Authority, the Reading Housing Authority and the City of Reading, Habitat is emerging as a key player in the ongoing strategic plan to restore the neighborhoods and communities in Reading.

Habitat for Humanity of Berks County relies on business partnerships, community volunteers and financial donations to help advance its mission in the City of Reading. For information on how to become involved, please visit Habitat's website, www.habitatberks.org or call 610-373-3439.

Did you know that.....

1. You can watch regular City Council meetings and Zoning Hearing Board live and archived on the City's website at www.ReadingPA.gov from your computer or device. At the bottom of the homepage click on Live and Archived Meeting Videos.
2. Door to door sales requires a permit from the Chief of Police. Those selling door to door are required to carry the permit with them. To check if a company is legal click on the Door to Door Solicitation Policy link on the left column on the City's home page at www.ReadingPA.gov
3. It is illegal for businesses to place advertisement materials under the windshield of your automobile and to post advertisements on poles and light standards.

Registration Required for more than Six Dogs/Cats

Reading began looking at a pet limitation in 2009 but took no action due to the backlash of resident complaints. But animal complaints in the City continued to grow, reaching 244 in 2013. There has also been an increase in the number of animal hoarding cases. As animal complaints and animal hoarding has also become a problem in other municipalities, other municipalities began to adopt legislation to regulate the number of dogs/cats per household to six. The City's Board of Health studied this issue and the regulations used in other municipalities and made a recommendation to City Council. In June 2014, the Reading City Council passed new regulations as recommended by the Board of Health regarding "the keeping of more than six (6) dogs/cats within City limits".

The new regulations amended the definition of cruelty to mirror the definition used by the State of PA and added definitions of wild felines and harboring. The most important component of the legislation is the requirement to register dogs/cats when there are six or more in one dwelling unit that are over three (3) months of age.

There is no cost to register and registration is good for a period of three years (or for the length of vaccinations for the first registration). Registration forms can be obtained on the City's website – www.ReadingPA.gov, through the Citizen Service Center – 1-877-727-3234, or through the Property Maintenance Division – 610-655-6214. In addition to the form, proof of vaccination and adequate care must be submitted.



If while investigating a complaint, the City determines that registration was necessary and was not submitted, the owner of the animals is subject to additional fines.

Want to go on vacation but think you can't afford it?

Well, here are some of the most affordable destinations right here, in the USA...

Yellowstone **Why go:** Yellowstone is home to breathtaking natural attractions for visitors of all ages. With miles of hiking and skiing paths, erupting hot springs and belching mud pools, adventure-seekers agree that the entrance fee is a small price to pay for a visit to America's oldest national park.

Yosemite **Why go:** With plenty of natural attractions and low-price camping areas, Yosemite offers refuge for those looking to escape their hectic urban lives. Like Yellowstone, Yosemite offers access to extensive hiking trails and scenery for a small entrance fee, and travelers can avoid high hotel prices by simply packing a tent.

Savannah **Why go:** Low prices are just one of the many perks of planning a trip to this southern city, not to mention picturesque architecture and restaurants dishing out hearty portions of Southern fare. With budget-friendly room rates, there's no excuse not to stay a few extra nights.

Nashville **Why go:** Known for offering some of the lowest hotel prices in the South — not to mention some of the most satisfying barbecue in the country — Nashville allows bargain hunters a laid-back getaway filled with down-home fun.

Washington D.C. **Why go:** Although hotel prices are not always budget-friendly, those who are patient can generally find a room to suit both taste and budget. And with a wide variety of things to do, visitors can spend a couple of guilt-free days perusing the dozens of free Smithsonian museums along the National Mall.

New Orleans **Why go:** New Orleans offers visitors a culturally rich getaway with prices that are much tamer than the city's reputation. Budget hotels are housed in historic buildings, and restaurants serve spicy portions of Cajun and Creole cuisine for a tiny price. Avoid a visit in March; Mardi Gras can be tough on any budget.

Get Involved in City Government.....Volunteer Opportunities

The City of Reading has many opportunities for residents to be involved in decisions made by their local government. At this time, the City needs residents to serve on several Boards, Authorities and Commissions (BAC). Four BACs are highlighted below along with a comprehensive list of all openings on City BACs.

The **Human Relations Commission** seeks to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodation in accordance with the terms of the City's Human Relation Ordinance, which includes discrimination against race, color, religion, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, sex, familial status, or handicap.

The **Animal Control Board** assists the City in ensuring the humane treatment of animals by regulating the care and control of animal related issues and enforces the exotic pet permit process. Interested applicants should have an understanding of animal issues in an urban environment.

The **Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB)** works with residents of the City's historic districts when exterior improvements are made to buildings. The Board ensures that the local and federal historical guidelines are followed. Interested applicants should be residents of one of the City's historic districts or have an interest in preservation.

The City has a **Main Street Board** which will work to improve the City's downtown area by administering a Main Street Program that will promote a sense of community and unified purpose, assure the historic continuity of the City's architectural heritage, improve the image and perception of the City to residents and visitors and strengthen economic rejuvenation of property and commerce for the benefit of all.

HVAC Board	3 openings
Zoning Hearing Board	1 alternate opening
Police Civil Service Board	1 opening
Historical Architectural Review	5 openings
Library Board	1 opening
Board of Health	1 opening + 1 alternate opening
Board of Ethics	1 opening
Building/Fire Code Board of Appeals	1 opening + 1 alternate opening
Animal Control Board	5 openings
Charter Board	1 opening
Housing Board of Appeals	3 openings
Main Street Board	4 openings
Redevelopment Authority	1 opening
Reading Housing Authority	2 openings
City Revitalization Improvement Zone	3 openings
Planning Commission	3 openings
Shade Tree Commission	2 openings
Stadium Commission	2 openings
Human Relations Commission	4 openings
Blighted Property Review Commission	1 opening
Environmental Advisory Council	1 opening



All interested citizens should complete the BAC application form found on the City's website – www.readingpa.gov – and return it to the City Clerk's office, 815 Washington St, Reading, PA 19601.

For additional information, please call the City Clerk's office at 610-655-6204 or email at council@readingpa.org.

